



Scenario #1: The Erie Canal

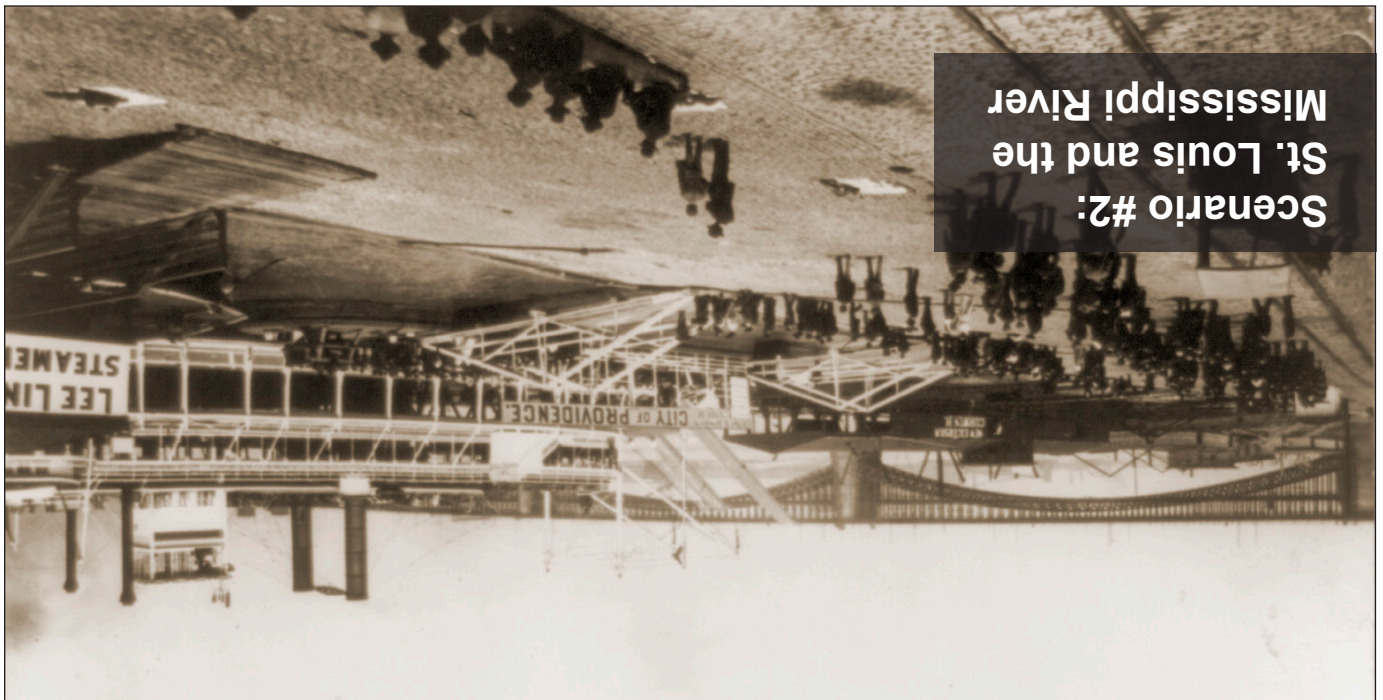
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Scenario #2: St. Louis and the Mississippi River

Wherever rivers flowed, settlement and prosperity followed. Early in the history of the United States, the government encouraged the development of waterways for transportation. The construction of canals was proposed as early as the late 1600s. However, it was not until 1730 that the first canal in the country was built in New York. About 100 years later, the Erie Canal, one of the most famous canals, was constructed. Completed in 1825, it is 363 miles long and connected Buffalo to Albany, New York. The Erie Canal led to the growth of many canal cities. It created a route west, connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes. The canal became an important route for the migration of settlers and the movement of products west. It also provided a route eastward for the West's agricultural goods. The Erie Canal sparked a big surge in canal building in the United States. Canals became major sources of transportation for migrants and supplies. The canals were the most important transportation method in the nation until the railroads were built.



St. Louis is one of Missouri's oldest and most prosperous cities, primarily because of its location along the Mississippi River. In the early 1800s, settlers followed the path of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and founded St. Louis. The city was called the "Gateway to the West." The arrival of the steamboat, however, encouraged the greatest boom in the city's population. The steamboat enabled the tourism industry to flourish. People started coming to St. Louis from all over the world, especially from Germany and Ireland. By the 1850s, river traffic had increased so much that St. Louis was the second-largest port in the United States. Only New York had a bigger port. The Mississippi River was used to transport people and goods north and south. Transportation along the river was important for the economy and for tourism. Some of the passenger steamboats traveling this route were very lavish, with lush carpets, chandeliers, and fancy food. Because of the river, St. Louis became the largest city west of Pittsburgh.



Scenario #3: The Platte River and the Oregon Trail

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Scenario #4: The Mormons and the Las Vegas Valley

As they moved west, pioneers, homesteaders, military personnel, mountaineers, and explorers followed the river valleys. The Platte River Valley was the first major river valley on the emigrants' trail, after they left the Missouri. The river valleys offered everything travelers needed for survival: water to drink, wood for fuel, and grass for grazing livestock. The Oregon Trail followed the Platte River through the Sweetwater River Valley in Wyoming. The Sweetwater River is a tributary of the Platte River. It served as an excellent route west across the Rocky Mountains. Its valley sloped gradually as it went over the mountains, so the pioneers were able to get over the mountains much more easily than at points farther south or north. This pass, called the South Pass, became the new gateway to the West.



Amid the deserts of the Southwest lies a valley of springs now called the Las Vegas Valley. These springs drew the Southern Paiute to the valley to grow crops. The valley later became an attractive place for settlers, gold miners, and travelers making their way across the desert. The Old Spanish Trail linked Los Angeles, California, to Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was used widely during the 1800s. The trail went through the Las Vegas Valley, where travelers could rest and enjoy the water. Since no fresh water was available within 50 miles, the valley soon became a settlement for many diverse peoples. The Mormons, followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, were drawn west in search of an area where they could settle and maintain their religious and cultural identity. They became the first people, after the American Indians, to settle in the Las Vegas Valley. The Mormons started a mission there. Using water from the springs, they planted a variety of crops, such as corn, oats, and beans. Even with water from the valley for long. Many people wanted to leave. The mission lasted only three years but it paved the way for development in the valley.



Along the South Fork of California’s American River, outside the small settlement of Coloma, John Sutter and James Marshall began building a sawmill in the fall of 1847. The site was perfect. It was surrounded by pine trees that could be easily milled and near a river that could be used to power the mill. Sutter and Marshall dug a ditch to carry water from the river to the sawmill. At first, the lower end of their ditch was too shallow, and water could not flow through the mill without stopping. They dug deeper. As water flowed through the deeper ditch, it carried away the sand and dirt and left heavier metals behind. One morning, James Marshall saw pieces of what looked like gold in the ditch. He picked up the pieces and took them to the sawmill. He and the other men at the mill tested the metal. It was gold! Even though the men tried to keep their discovery a secret, word spread quickly. This discovery triggered the California Gold Rush of 1849. The sleepy little outpost of Coloma rapidly became a bustling mining town, where thousands of people searched for gold.

